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ABSTRACT

A study explored the beliefs, self-reported practices, and professional development needs of three classroom teachers (grades 4, 5, and 10) with language-minority students. A case history of each teacher was developed from interviews, classroom observations, and entries from teacher journals. Analysis revealed that (1) the teachers' beliefs about language-minority students and their programs may be based on hearsay and misinformation; (2) the teachers do not vary their planning for this population, but frequently vary lesson implementation; (3) selection of instructional practices may be based on naive notions of language proficiency and the demands of the mainstream classroom; and (4) the teachers draw on intuitive wisdom because of lack of preservice education or staff development regarding language-minority students. Based on these findings, it is recommended that: preservice teacher education curricula be designed in a way that integrates the social, political, and cultural realities of a multicultural student population; staff development be specific to the local context; teachers collaborate with other teachers, parents, and administrators about the education of language-minority students; and more research be conducted on teacher beliefs and behavior, innovative preservice teacher education, and inservice staff development models regarding language-minority issues. (MSE)

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ESL Teacher Educators and Teachers: Insights from Classroom Teachers with Language-Minority Students

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There is a plethora of programs for language-minority students, but because of social, political and economic factors, many language-minority students spend only a portion of their day in the ESL classroom. The rest of their day is spent in the regular classroom, yet mainstream teachers are generally not prepared to integrate these students (Clair, 1993; Wong-Fillmore and Meyer, 1992; Scarcella, 1990; Penfield, 1987).

Frequently, the ESL teacher is the only professional in the school who understands language-minority students and second language development. Therefore, ESL teacher education programs must prepare the ESL teacher for an expanded role. First, findings of a qualitative study of three classroom teachers with language-minority students are presented. Next, implications for ESL teacher education and the role of the ESL teacher follow.

The Study: Method, Conclusions and Implications

With approximately 30% of all language-minority students in the regular classroom (Lara, et. al 1990), this qualitative study explores the beliefs, self-reported practices and professional development needs of three classroom teachers (grades 4, 5 and 10) with language-minority students (Clair, 1993).

Case histories of the teachers were composed from transcripts of in-depth interviews, notes from classroom observations and entries from teachers' and researcher journals. The analysis reveals that (a) the teachers' beliefs towards language-minority students and their programs may be based on hearsay and misinformation; (b) the teachers do not vary their planning, but frequently vary lesson implementation; (c) selection of instructional practices may be based on naive notions of language proficiency and the demands of the mainstream classroom; (d) the teachers draw on intuitive wisdom because of a lack of preservice teacher education and ineffective inservice staff development regarding issues related to language-minority students.

The implications, targeted to teacher educators, staff developers, teachers and administrators, focus on preservice and inservice teacher education, because it is

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through education that beliefs and practices may be treated. First, teacher educators need to embrace a more critical conception of schooling that considers the social, political and cultural realities of a diverse student population when creating preservice curricular designs. Second, inservice staff development regarding language-minority student issues should be context-specific; driven by the needs and commitments of the teachers and the resources of the school and community. Third, teachers have implicit responsibilities to engage in dialogue and collaborate with other teachers, parents and administrators about the education of language-minority students. Finally, more research focusing on teacher beliefs and behavior, innovative preservice teacher education and inservice staff development models regarding language-minority issues is needed.

ESL Teacher Education

Without diminishing the importance of all the findings, this report focuses on the relationship between classroom and ESL teachers, the role of ESL teacher education and ESL teachers. Corroborating Penfield's findings (1987) there appears to be a lack of understanding between classroom teachers and ESL teachers. Therefore, all teacher educators have a responsibility to address this issue. Mainstream and ESL teachers will need to establish, at minimum, a common vocabulary as they educate language-minority students. How can ESL teacher education programs facilitate this?

Current practices.

There is a paucity of research into the nature of ESL teacher education programs (Lange, 1990; Richards, 1990). Despite this situation, most ESL teacher education programs are composed of three components: (a) the theoretical that draws primarily from linguistics and second language acquisition theory; (b) the methodological that focuses on second language teaching methodology; (c) the practical that is student teaching (Richards, 1990).

There is a distinction in the second language teacher education literature between the micro context and the macro context of teaching and learning. However, it is deceivingly narrow. For example, the micro approach is described as looking at second language teaching from an analytical perspective, one that focuses on teachers' observable behavior. In contrast, the macro approach, is described as holistic, one that generalizes and infers beyond observable behavior to the whole classroom environment (Richards, 1990). Thinking about ESL teaching from a macro perspective is a step in the right direction only if the macro definition is expanded. What is missing, especially for those ESL teachers who are being certified for K-12, is a much broader definition of

the macro context that includes not only the classroom environment, but the school climate, the community and society at large.

The nature of the ESL teachers' job makes the inclusion of the macro context all the more important in ESL teacher education programs. Regardless of where one is aligned in the debate about language-minority education, there is at least one indisputable goal. That is, teaching language for ESL teachers is a minimal responsibility. ESL teachers must not only teach language (L2), but they must teach language-minority students how to use the new language as a vehicle for acquiring academic content and gaining social success. Therefore, it is essential that ESL teachers understand the greater context within which their language-minority students fit, which includes at minimum, understanding the demands of the mainstream classroom, the mainstream teachers' challenges and concerns, the culture of the school and the community.

As evidenced in the reported study, none of the mainstream teachers had a clear idea of what transpires in ESL classrooms. Given the isolation of teachers, this lack of understanding between teachers responsible for the same students is most likely a two-way street. Assuming that the goal of education is quality instruction for all students, all teachers with the same students must collaborate.

Collaboration does not necessarily happen spontaneously; it must be learned. It is essential that ESL teacher education address the societal context within which language-minority students belong. ESL teachers must understand the dilemmas that language-minority students face outside the language classroom. Morevoer, ESL teachers must understand the challenges that mainstream teachers face. Finally, when language-minority students are in pull-out and regular classes, ESL teachers must be aware of the potential conflicts between their responsibilities and the classroom teachers' responsibilities. Collaboration must be discussed and practiced.

ESL Teachers

Like ESL teacher educators, ESL teachers have implicit responsibilities. The point is not to disregard the sociopolitical structures of schools but to concede that individual teachers have responsibility for their actions.

There are ethical dimensions of teacher behavior. ESL teachers, frequently the only school professionals that understand second language development, have a responsibility to communicate and collaborate with other teachers, parents and administrators about the education of students. Moreover, ESL teachers have a moral

responsibility to participate actively as advocates for language-minority students (Cazden, 1986) and as change agents in schools (Cochran-Smith, 1991).

If ESL teachers are products of traditional educational systems that implicitly seek to replicate the status quo, how can they learn to become advocates and change agents? There is no easy answer to this question; however, ESL teacher leaders do exist. Perhaps, through reflection and collaboration with experienced change agents within schools, more traditionally educated ESL teachers will discover the moral and social responsibilities that are inherent in teaching. Cochran-Smith (1991) calls this process "'collaborative resonance' the intensification of opportunities to learn from teaching through the co-labor of communities" (p.304).

The lack of support in some schools makes it difficult for ESL teachers to collaborate. However, ESL teachers can overcome this difficulty by seeking ideas or opinions from outside sources. Friends, experts and mentors can provide insights without passing judgment and new ideas can be taken back to school and implemented.

In sum, the findings of a qualitative study that explored the perspectives of three classroom teachers with language-minority students suggest that misunderstandings exist between some classroom and ESL teachers despite the fact they are responsible for many of the same students. Through ESL teacher education programs that stress a more critical conception of teaching and ESL teachers who find creative ways to collaborate with mainstream teachers, perhaps the quality of education for language-minority students will increase.

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